



Phoebe. J. from her Aunt Eliza.

1857


8.00

6720

Don't -
some traits of an excellent
spirit

- #1 Temperance
2 a spirit opposed to idol
3 Loyalty to ^{the} government
4 Temporal or National
5 Holy government
6 Amity under Prosperity
7 unrelated " adversity
8. Prayerful spirit
9 a spirit to labor for other
happiness -

III such a spirit will
always secure promotion
Noted Joseph - Potiphar
Noted Paul -
Noted Daniel - made
second in the Kingdom



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2011 with funding from

The Institute of Museum and Library Services through an Indiana State Library LSTA Grant



Bessie Gordon's Lesson.



Uncle Herbert helped her down the cellar steps. p. 28.

PESSIE GORDON'S



LESSON.

BESSIE GORDEN'S LESSON;

OR,

THE POOR CHILDREN IN THE BASEMENT.

PHILADELPHIA:
AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION,
1122 CHESTNUT STREET.

New York:
599 BROADWAY.

Boston:
141 WASHINGTON ST.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1859, by the
AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION,
in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the Eastern District of
Pennsylvania.

~~Be~~ No books are published by the AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION without the sanction of the Committee of Publication, consisting of fourteen members, from the following denominations of Christians, viz.: Baptist, Methodist, Congregational, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Reformed Dutch. Not more than three of the members can be of the same denomination, and no book can be published to which any member of the Committee shall object.

mg. 11968

BESSIE GORDEN'S LESSON:

OR,

THE POOR CHILDREN IN THE BASEMENT.

CHAPTER I.

"ANOTHER piece of bread and butter, if you please," said little Bessie, as she sat in her high chair between her aunt and her father at her grandfather's well-spread tea-table.

Bessie's mother had been taken out of this world by death when her little girl was but a few weeks more than two years old; and grandfather's house became the child's home now.

Aunt Mary cut a delicate slice from the nice, white loaf, and, spreading it with the

fresh, sweet butter, put it before her niece.

Bessie took a few bites, and, wastefully crumbling the rest with her fingers, let it fall in a little heap upon her plate.

"May I have a piece of cake, aunt?" she asked, lolling about on her seat and rubbing her eyes languidly, as if she had already eaten so much as to make her sleepy. She did not look at her aunt, or at the cake, but across the table at Cousin Charlie, who was eating his bread and milk at a ravenous rate; and she quite forgot her request until Aunt Mary put a nice bit of sponge-cake into her hand. Then she nibbled at it for a minute and, laying the rest upon the cloth, pushed her chair from the table and ran off to play, leaving the fragments to be brushed away by the servant.

Aunt Mary did not seem to notice it, it had become so common a thing for Bessie to do so.

The child was not herself aware how many tempting bits were brcken up by her

little hands and spoiled for other hungry mouths; and her father was so absorbed in his necessary duties, which allowed him scarcely time to take even a hurried meal, that he had not the leisure to correct this very serious fault.

So little Bessie was in danger of growing up a careless, wasteful girl.

Opposite Bessie at table sat her uncle Herbert. He was a good, thoughtful person, whose heart was full of love towards God and man, and whose constant wish it was to do his heavenly Father's will and to lead others to love and serve the same kind and holy Being.

At every meal, as he looked across at the child's plate, he saw the collection of broken bits, sometimes larger, sometimes smaller, but always there, either in tiny pieces or so mixed with other food as to be unfit to save for any purpose.

It troubled him very much. Bessie was a dear child, and he could not bear to see her so careless of God's good gifts without

trying to cure her of the evil habit before it should become fixed and difficult.

Several times he had told her how sinful it was to take things upon her plate simply to waste them; but still the little girl kept asking for "more" even when her appetite was wholly satisfied and she could only take a mouthful and scatter the rest about her. She often felt ashamed as she looked over at her uncle and then down upon her untidy place at the table; for this was not a wilful fault with Bessie: it had grown into a thoughtless habit, just as the beginning of wrong will always do unless we watch it and check it in the very bud.

Uncle Herbert had brought home some delicious oranges one day for tea, and Aunt Mary opened one of the finest for Bessie.

When it was half eaten she asked for a banana. This was also given her by her too indulgent aunt and, as usual, partly devoured and left, and Bessie went to her play again.

Presently she returned to her aunt and,

hanging about her chair, asked for a whole orange, although there was yet upon her plate more than half of the one which was given her at first.

Aunt Mary never liked to deny her any thing, and she went off with the second orange in her hand.

Uncle Herbert found her after tea upon the door-step playing with the dog. She had cut her orange into quarters and eaten one of them; the rest lay upon the ground, where it had been trodden down in her frolic with Pompey.

Uncle Herbert looked very sad; but, instead of reproving her with words, he stooped down, and, picking up the pieces of the orange, laid them upon the step before her.

Bessie knew all that was in his heart; and it touched her even more than if he had spoken reproachfully to her, and she thought she would never be wasteful any more; but the next morning there was a large piece

of corn-bread and half an egg upon her plate when she had done breakfast, and Uncle Herbert's countenance was very grave as he went from the table.

CHAPTER II.

GRANDFATHER'S eyes were dim with age and long use. One of them was quite sightless, and over the other a thin film was growing, so that he could not read at prayers always, and it fell to good Uncle Herbert's lot to lead the devotions of the family.

He called Bessie to bring her little rocking-chair and sit close by him, and he found the place in her Bible, so that she could better follow him as he read and not have her thoughts all over the room, as she sometimes did.

Instead of reading on in course he selected several passages in different parts of the Bible. The first place that he turned to was the fourteenth chapter of Matthew, and

he read from the thirteenth verse to the twenty-second.

It was where Jesus, when he was on earth, made the five loaves and two fishes serve for five thousand men, besides women and children, and when all were fed "they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full."

Then he found the fifteenth chapter of the same Gospel, where our Saviour satisfied the multitude with the seven loaves and the few fishes, "and after they did all eat and were filled they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full."

Then he turned once more to the sixth chapter of John and asked Bessie herself to read the eleventh and twelfth verses, which he wished her to learn and repeat to him at evening.

Bessie was a good reader, although but seven years old, and her clear, young voice was heard by all in the room.

The passage that she read was this:—
"And Jesus took the loaves, and, when he

had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes, as much as they would.

"When they were filled he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost."

There needed no comment upon these verses to assure Bessie that they were chosen especially for her; and when Uncle Herbert had asked God's blessing upon the new day that was before them all, and besought him to aid them to follow his holy example in all things, as he arose from his knees the little girl whispered in his ear, "I should like to be careful of the fragments, Uncle Herbert."

"There is only one way to do it, dear Bessie," said her uncle: "that is, 'Watch and pray.' At first it will be very difficult to remember; but if you are in earnest you may remove mountains through God's help."

Bessie said she thought "she could never be able to remove a mountain," and Uncle

Herbert explained to her that "he meant by this she could overcome the greatest and most serious fault with the assistance of her heavenly Friend, if she would only call upon him faithfully and constantly and try her best to do it."

At dinner she forgot again, because her uncle Herbert was not then opposite to remind her of it, and at night she had only a very little pile of bread, not half so much as usual, because, just as she had broken up one piece and was about to ask for another, she caught a serious eye fastened earnestly upon her, and she thought immediately of her error and of her promise.

But Uncle Herbert was not always by to check and remind her. It happened that he was called away for a week or two at the very time when Bessie most needed his presence; and, as the little girl trusted more to his care and watching than to her own, and did not go often to her heavenly Father for help, nor think of the sleepless eye that was ever looking upon her, she made no

advance in the cure of her fault, and, when her good uncle returned, was worse than ever.

This was discouraging indeed; but Uncle Herbert did not give up the effort to benefit his little niece. He knew that if, when she was young and tender, a bad habit had such control over her, it would be almost impossible to break it when she had grown up to be a woman, with a will that could not be controlled like the will of a child.

He determined therefore to teach her by means of a very sad lesson that had lately come home to his own heart.

CHAPTER III.

BESSIE lived in the country, and Uncle Herbert's business was in the city; and his little niece had frequently asked him to take her with him. This he had never done, for it was hardly a suitable place for such a child. The walks were encumbered with barrels and boxes and all sorts of things, and the narrow streets were crowded with drays and trucks, and rough men whose language was not always fit for a child's ears to hear.

One morning, however, as he observed upon Bessie's plate the remnant of a nice muffin and a thick slice of buttered toast, he called her and said,—

“If Aunt Mary is willing, I think I will take you to the store to-day.”

Bessie was perfectly delighted and ran to

get permission, which was quickly obtained; for Aunt Mary would trust her with good Uncle Herbert sooner than with anybody in the world.

It was pleasant crossing the ferry to the city. There were so many nice-looking children, all prettily dressed and plump and healthy and rosy, with kind mothers or faithful nurses to look after them at every step; and when they reached the city on the other side of the ferry Uncle Herbert took an omnibus before going to business, and pointed out to Bessie a great many beautiful objects.

He stopped at a great eating-house and led the little girl past the tables, at which many people were regaling themselves upon rich things. And then he went with his niece into a green-house, where the bright flowers were looking cheery enough and breathing a delicious perfume all about. And then they visited several magnificent establishments, where costly and elegant goods were to be sold; and Bessie gazed

with wonder at every thing and thought, "What a grand world this is, with such plenty everywhere!"

By-and-by Uncle Herbert saw by his watch that it was time for him to be at the store; and he led Bessie out of the great thoroughfare into a narrower street where were no gay things to attract one's notice, but only the heavy boxes and hogsheads and bales of goods

Presently, after winding about a little, Uncle Herbert stopped at a large store, where was scarcely space between the boxes and bales to pass along to the back office.

It seemed very dingy after all the brightness she had seen, and there was a smell of hops and cheese and other disagreeable things that Bessie did not at all relish.

The room where Uncle Herbert had his desks and safe, and where he spent nearly all the day, was like a square prison-house to Bessie, who had a wide, free range in her grandfather's house, with enough of sunlight to make it cheerful; but she managed

to pass the time tolerably with a pet kitten she found there.

When she grew weary of this and was wandering about, not knowing what to do, Uncle Herbert led her up a flight of stairs into a front office upon the second floor and sat with her by the window, looking out upon the street.

The draymen were as busy as bees, loading and unloading their carts, and there were stout men passing heavy goods up and down in the different stores, and all was hurry and activity.

Bessie did not think there was much pleasure in such a scene, and would have preferred the gay streets and the beautiful sights that had dazzled her in the morning before they had reached this ugly place; but Uncle Herbert had an object in keeping her by the window a little while longer.

He was telling her a story to keep her contented, when she pulled his arm and pointed out to him a miserable-looking party coming up the street.

There was an elderly woman with a bundle of sticks upon her back and two forlorn, pitiable children following her with a little basket of refuse coals, which they could but just lift, so weak were they for want of food.

The mother wore a scanty dress that scarcely clung to her thin figure. Then she had a pair of ragged shoes upon her feet and an old, worn-out hood covered her head.

The children had hardly rags enough to hide their little limbs, and were without bonnets and shoes.

"Oh, uncle!" said Bessie, keeping her eyes upon them until they disappeared down some basement-steps on the opposite side of the street.

"What poor creatures! Where have they gone?"

"*Home!*" said Uncle Herbert, sadly.

"What! That dark place? Is that a *home?*?" asked the child, with a look of pity and horror.

"All the home these poor people have,

dear little Bessie. Could you not be happy there?"

There were tears in the child's eyes as she looked at her uncle, amazed at his asking her such a question.

She did not answer him; but her heart was swelling with pity as she turned her gaze again towards the basement-steps.

After a few minutes the children came up again and seated themselves upon the curbstone, almost under a horse's heels.

Oh, how different were they from the happy, rosy group Bessie had noticed in crossing the ferry!

CHAPTER IV.

NEXT door to Uncle Herbert's store was a place where they made candles; and the night-watchman lived there with his wife. They had two rooms, furnished comfortably; and, although it was a very humble and lowly home compared with many others in the city, it was yet better than thousands of poor people occupy. They had enough to eat and drink and wear, and they were more than grateful for their goodly condition as they looked upon their miserable neighbour in the opposite basement.

The watchman's wife had been cooking her dinner, and, just as the city-hall-bell struck twelve, she came to the front door and threw some potato-parings out into the gutter.

A cart that was passing at the moment

crushed some of them into the water and covered the rest with mud; but, with a shout of joy, the two little half-starved children ran across the street and, pouncing upon the parings, ate them as greedily as Bessie would the choicest morsel.

Bessie was perfectly shocked at the sight, and, with an expression of face indicating the utmost disgust, she said,—

“Oh, Uncle Herbert, the little dirty creatures! Did you see them?”

It was not the first time that Uncle Herbert had been pained by such an exhibition. Every day, in passing to and from his store, there met him such miserable, squalid objects that his heart was often sick within him; and he would say, in words which none but God could hear, “Help them, O Saviour of the wretched, out of thine infinite mercy and abundance!”

Now he spoke the prayer aloud, and Bessie saw by his earnest face how much he suffered from this pitiable spectacle; but

she said again, as she thought of the reeking gutters,—

“Filthy little things!”

“Bessie, were you ever hungry?” asked Uncle Herbert,—quite sternly, as Bessie thought.

He did not mean to be severe; but his mind was upon the nice muffin and toast that were left untouched upon the child's plate that morning, when these miserable little beggars were dying for want of bread; and he said, as he looked out upon the hungry children and their strange meal,—

“You were never hungry, Bessie. If you had had nothing to eat for a day or two, perhaps, and felt such terrible cravings as these children often feel, you would be ready to snatch from their hands this food that now seems so loathsome to you.”

Bessie stared, as if she thought such a state of things could never exist, and Uncle Herbert continued:—

“We, who are daily fed with the richest of God's bounty, know nothing of the ter-

rible straits to which the starving are reduced.

“ There have been people in large and wealthy cities, with plenty to eat and drink, and their enemies have come about them and hedged them in on every side, so that when the provision within the walls was consumed they could not get out to get more. Then what misery and horror! Men eating the meanest things of the earth, and even their own flesh! That is dreadful. But how much more heart-rending to find famished and perishing creatures in this city of waste and luxury, where the store-houses are filled to overflowing with grain and produce of every description, and many a table is bending under its load of luxury! How sad it is, when people are indulging themselves to a surfeit, and throwing to the swine meat fit for kings, that these poor creatures are living from day to day with so little to eat that they satisfy their cravings from the refuse of the gutters, which even the dogs would refuse!”

Uncle Herbert said all this as if speaking to himself, and as if quite unconscious of Bessie's presence; but the little girl's heart was touched by the picture; and, laying her head upon her uncle's bosom, she cried bitterly.

‘If we really pity the needy,’ said Uncle Herbert, “we shall try to save all we do not want, and even deny ourselves many a luxury, in order to bestow blessings and comforts upon them.”

Bessie remembered her bad habit of wasting; and, as she thought of the untouched breakfast upon her plate, she said, as she looked at the little beggars through her tears,—

“Oh, if I had only that muffin and toast here now!”

CHAPTER V.

THE children finished eating the potato-parings and went back to their perch upon the curbstone. It was sunny there and very pleasant to them, compared with the dark cellar where nearly all their time was spent. Besides, they were keeping guard over the watchman's premises; for presently the scraps from the dinner would be thrown from the door, and then they would get another feast!

By-and-by, sure enough, out came a platter of bones, picked very clean from meat, and boiled and soaked until nearly all the marrow was gone from them; but they were eagerly sought by the hungry children, who ran joyfully off with them to the dark basement

Bessie could bear it no longer. "Uncle Herbert," said she, jumping from his knee and pulling nervously at his hand, "we must find some bread."

Her good uncle did not wish to resist her earnest appeal; and in a few minutes they were on their way to a bakery, where they purchased two or three loaves.

Bessie could not help shrinking from the gloomy entrance when Uncle Herbert helped her down the cellar-steps as they went on their mission of love; but she pressed closer to his side and clung to his hand, and so followed him into the damp, dark place.

The mother of the children sat upon an old chair, rocking to and fro, and in real distress,—for she could get neither work nor food; and she looked up in amazement as she heard a strange voice and saw Uncle Herbert's basket with the loaves of bread.

Oh, how the little, hungry children

sprang at the bread as soon as they were told it was for them! and how they ate it ravenously, without butter, or cheese, or any other relish than that which their long fast had given them!

It was a sight that Bessie could never forget,—the distressed mother and the two half-clad, starving children clutching at the white loaves, and looking gratefully up at Uncle Herbert, as if they thought him an angel from heaven.

It was a most effectual lesson for Bessie. It was a sermon that needed no voice to make her understand it.

“Uncle Herbert,” said she, as they came up from the gloom into the broad, beautiful day, “that place is like the vault where they put coffins. I couldn’t breathe there. Do they keep live people in such places?”

Her uncle did not wonder that Bessie felt thus; for it seemed even to him a fitter abode for the dead than for the living.

It was a sad thing to him to be obliged

to show Bessie the wretched side of this beautiful world; but he knew that if she saw only the good she would begin to think it her abiding home, and if permitted to revel in plenty, without thought of the poor, it would make her selfish and unloving, when he would have her to be noble and generous, with her heart full of kind feelings that would prompt her to kind deeds towards all her race.

They were both very quiet on the way home. Uncle Herbert was intent upon some means to help the mother and her two little ones to a home above ground, where they could have now and then a breath of the pure, free air,—and Bessie was wondering “if all the scraps she had wasted for the last week would not have helped to make plump the thin, brown arms of the beggar-children.”

She did not once notice the bright, merry groups upon the boat, as they recrossed the ferry on their way to her grandfather's

house; but, she curled herself up on one of the seats beside him and framed questions that she meant to ask when she should get home.

CHAPTER VI.

It was five o'clock when they sat down to rest in her grandfather's parlour.

Bessie had been up-stairs to put aside her bonnet, and had come down with her pocket sticking out as if stuffed to its utmost capacity.

Uncle Herbert had a newspaper in his hand; and she had been taught never to disturb any one that is reading.

For a minute or two she fluttered about the room, and then, moving her rocking-chair close to her uncle's elbow, she seated herself quietly, with her hand upon her pocket and her eyes anxiously watching the first moment to catch her uncle's attention.

Presently he laid the paper down and rested his hand upon her head.

This was the happy time, she thought; and, tugging at the pocket, she managed, by dint of hard work and turning it inside out, to pull out her little tin savings-bank with its treasure of silver that had been accumulating for seven long years,—ever since her birth.

She believed it to contain untold wealth, and it was a great sacrifice that she had come to make of her cherished means.

Aunt Mary had told her that upon her eighth birthday she should open her bank and buy a present for her father to keep all his life long in remembrance of his dear little girl,—as if her father needed anything to tell him of the little daughter who was always so near his heart. But Bessie had long dwelt upon Aunt Mary's promise, and had half made up her mind what to get, and had pictured to herself what pleasure she would take in a little locket to be worn next to her father's heart; for this was the gift she had in view,—her own little, loving face looking out from its golden case every

time her dear father should choose to gaze upon it.

It cost Bessie a desperate effort to give it up; but she climbed on her uncle Herbert's knee and, putting the bank into his hand and her arms around his neck, she whispered,—

“This is to buy the poor children a better house, Uncle Herbert.”

He did not say, “No, no, Bessie: keep your money: I will help these people without you;” but he took it joyously and, breaking it open, counted out what was equal to ten bright dollars.

“Ah!” said he, with a smile that Bessie felt through her whole soul, “this will do such good! For five whole months it will find them a sunny room. And then we'll save all the bread-crumbs,” added he, with a sly look at his blushing niece, “and see if they will not fill out the shrunken skin and make good, solid flesh, like this;” and he tried to pinch Bessie's fat arm, that would

scarcely yield a particle to his fingers, so substantial and firm was it.

That night at tea-time there were no half-eaten bits on Bessie's plate; and next morning, after breakfast, she met Uncle Herbert in the hall, as he was going to business, and put into his hand a parcel, with four slices of bread and butter for the poor children in the basement.

—"Because you know, uncle," said she, "it is only what I used to waste."

And Uncle Herbert stooped down and patted her chubby cheeks, saying encouragingly to her,—

"With such a nice meal as this every day our little basement-girls would soon be equal to my Bessie,—no more hollow eyes and wasted faces and weakly, tottering limbs;" and he gave Bessie a very sweet verse to learn that day,—one that was full of blessing to her. It was our Saviour's words to his disciples:—

"Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye

have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Our readers must not think that Bessie conquered her old habit without trouble. She was often forgetful and in danger of falling back into her old fault; but with great care and perseverance and prayer, and with the vision of the starving children eating the potato-parings from the gutter ever freshly before her, she was enabled to overcome her wasteful propensity and to minister of the gathered fragments to many of the poor and needy.

THE END.

